

The Stanford Special train, en route from Sacramento to the Gold Spike festivities opening the first transcontinental railroad, meets a covered wagon train near Promontory on May 8, 1869. This point is 674 miles from Sacramento. (Photo Courtesy Southern Pacific Company)

Continent United By Railroad 98 Years Ago

By Kathryn D. Groesbeck

The joining of the Union and Central Pacific Railroads May 10, 1869, united the continent with the West becoming available to all.

The story of the building of the railroad developed into an exciting one though the Pacific Railroad, as the joint trackage was called, got under way rather obscurely. In Omaha at the eastern beginning there was little concern when the first rail was laid and the first spike driven. That was a year and a half after ground had been broken in Sacramento for the track of the Central Pacific east.

The Big Four (Huntington, Stanford, Hopkins, and Crocker), who built the Central, were in the money from the line long before it reached Utah. Carrying produce from the Sierra foothills and eventually mine products from the Comstock Lode in Nevada had proved highly profitable. Opponents of the line believed that its backers never intended to try to build farther to meet any line coming from the east.

Union Pacific

All this time, the Union Pacific in its formative stage was barely heard from. Only when the government picked up interest and newspapers reported the success of the Central financially and the magnitude of the work already accomplished did the country focus its attention on the completion of a transcontinental line and the opportunities it would provide. From then on, for four years, the building of the line received great publicity.

It was a rugged job for both lines, but especially for Charlie Crocker and his gangs of Chinese working for the Central. No grades and no storms out from Omaha were comparable

to those of the High Sierras. From Omaha it was chiefly prairie desolation that had to be conquered. The records say massed Indian attacks were extremely rare though legends picture them as common.

Employment to 600

Economically the building through Utah, where money was scarce, proved highly profitable. Though the saints were too poor to subscribe money, whatever of aid or material their land and labor could supply was cheerfully furnished. Brigham Young's contract with the Union Pacific amounted to about \$1,000,000 and gave employment to about 600 men chiefly on the road between the head of Echo Canyon and the terminus of the line, yet to be located.

Among those awarded contracts by the Central Pacific was Lorin Farr, who, with Benson and West as partners, graded 200 miles of the road, Aaron F. Farr being employed as superintendent.

When the lines finally met, dramatic ceremonies were accomplished at Promontory May 10, 1869. Though everything seemed to go wrong with even the weather unfit for a celebration, the last rail was laid and the last spike driven to complete the transcontinental Pacific Railroad.

Pioneer Photographer

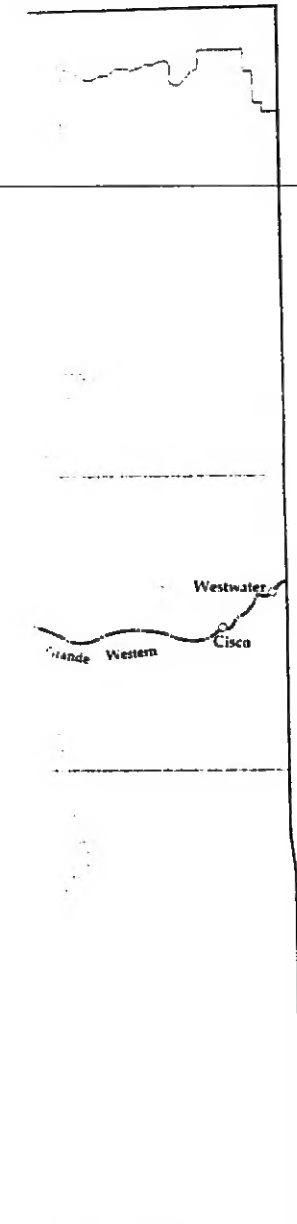
Yet dignitaries who should

have been present were not there. Charlie Crocker, the builder, and even Brigham Young were absent. Utah pioneer photographer, Charles Savage, however, was present and caught with his camera the most important single photographic record of the United States in the nineteenth century—the joining of the continent by rail. Even a bottle of champagne was in evidence of the great event.

Briefly the eyes of the world were turned upon Promontory. Trains arrived and departed from there at all hours with passengers changing trains where the two lines met, often pausing several hours to transfer mail and baggage. During that time some passengers patronized the saloons — there reportedly were five at first — or visited "the abodes of the girls." Gamblers set up their tables and seldom failed to win.

With the inclusion, in time, of through Pullmans Promontory declined economically until few if any passengers stepped off the cars at that place. With Ogden eventually being made the junction city of the two lines, Promontory declined even more. Finally the building of the Lucin Cutoff in 1905 brought traffic over Great Salt Lake at a great saving in time and money. Next, during the Second World War the rails were torn up around Promontory until there's not much left there except a monument to mark the site where the Jupiter of the Central Pacific and the No. 119 of the Union Pacific met in the desolate northern wasteland of Utah to unite the continent by rail.

ROADS, 1869-1910



- LEGEND**
(date indicates completion of railroad)
- Union Pacific, Central Pacific
May 10, 1869
 - - - Utah Central
Jan. 10, 1870
 - - - - Summit County (Coalville and Echo)
May 14, 1873
 - - - - Bingham Canyon, Camp Floyd
Nov. 21, 1873
 - - - - Utah and Northern (Utah Northern)
Feb. 8, 1874
 - - - - Utah Western
Dec. 14, 1874
 - - - - Utah Southern
June 13, 1879
 - - - - Utah Southern Extension
June 23, 1880
 - - - - Denver and Rio Grande
Nov. 14, 1890
 - - - - Sevier Valley
July 15, 1891
 - - - - Tintic Range
Jan. 1, 1892
 - - - - San Pete Valley
Dec. 1, 1893
 - - - - Heber Valley
June 5, 1898
 - - - - San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake
Jan. 30, 1905
 - - - - Lucin Cutoff
Aug. 25, 1905
 - - - - Western Pacific
May 14, 1910
 - - - - Salt Lake and Utah
July 15, 1916
 - - - - Newer Railroads
- D & R G = Present owner of railroad line

For reference, see Bibliography, numbers 180, 264

Railroads, 1869-1910

The history of the railroads in Utah began when the crews of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads entered the state from opposite directions and raced to get the most track laid before linking up to form the nation's first transcontinental line. The first train on the Union Pacific reached Ogden from the east on March 8, 1869, and the last spike of the Transcontinental Railroad was driven at Promontory Summit on May 10 of the same year. The weakness of the transcontinental route, as far as the settlers of Utah were concerned, was that it completely bypassed the populated areas of the state, with the exception of Ogden. To provide rail access for Salt Lake City and the other populated centers of the state, therefore, the Utah Central Railroad was proposed by Mormon church leaders. This railroad was incorporated on March 8, 1869, the same day the tracks of the Union Pacific reached Ogden, and on May 17, 1869, construction was started southward from Ogden, the workers being supplied from Mormon wards in towns along the route. Much of the equipment used on the Utah Central came from the Union Pacific and Central Pacific as payment for work done by Utahns in building the railroad west through Weber Canyon and east from Humboldt Wells in Nevada. By January 10, 1870, the Utah Central had reached Salt Lake City, thereby connecting the largest settlement of Utah via rail with the rest of the nation. Unlike the Golden Spike, however, the last spike of the Utah Central—driven by Brigham Young, who pointedly did not attend the Golden Spike ceremony the previous spring—was made of Utah iron, symbolizing the line's local ownership and construction.

Construction on another line was begun October 20, 1869, when the Utah Eastern and Summit County Railroad was started. This road, then called the Coalville and Echo Railroad, was begun to bring coal from Coalville to the Union Pacific tracks at Echo—to provide coal for the locomotives on the line. This line was apparently completed by May 14, 1873. In 1871 two additional extensions to the Utah Central system were begun. The Utah Southern Railroad was extended southward through Utah Valley to Nephi from the terminus of the Utah Central in Salt Lake City. Organized on January 17, 1871, and with work beginning on May 1 of that year, it was open to Sandy by September 6, 1871. By October 19, 1873, the Utah Southern had reached Utah Valley at American Fork, and was completed to Nephi on June 13, 1879. The Utah Northern Railroad between Brigham City and Logan was organized on August 23, 1871. Rail laying commenced on March 29, 1872, and the railroad reached Logan on January 9, 1873. After the completion of that road a four mile branch line was constructed from Brigham City to Corinne on June 9, 1873, thus providing connections from Logan to the Transcontinental Railroad. The Utah Northern was run south to Ogden by February 8, 1874, and had been

extended north to Franklin, Idaho, by March 15, 1874. In 1878 the railroad was purchased by the Union Pacific and renamed the Utah and Northern Railroad. The line was ultimately extended to Silver Bowl, Montana, in 1880. The Utah and Northern consolidated with the Oregon Short Line Railroad in 1889. The Utah Western Railway had its origin in May 1872 as the Salt Lake, Sevier Valley and Pioche Railroad, which proposed to build a narrow-gauge line west from Salt Lake through Rush Valley, the Tintic area, and the western Sevier Valley to the mines of Pioche, Nevada. Work began on May 14, 1873, but no rails were laid until the Utah Western was formed in August 1874—when the Salt Lake, Sevier Valley and Pioche was declared defunct. By December 14, 1874, the Utah Western was running trains from Salt Lake City into the mountains near Garfield Beach. Financial difficulties forced the Utah Western out of business in 1880, and the Utah and Nevada Railroad was organized in 1881 to continue construction. The Utah and Nevada was hardly started when it was acquired by the Union Pacific. The line was completed to Stockton and ultimately became a part of the Oregon Short Line system. The Utah Southern Extension Railroad Company, organized in January 1897, was designed to extend the Utah Southern south to the mining areas of Beaver County. The road was completed to Deseret by the first of November 1879, to Milford by the middle of May 1880, and to Frisco on June 23, 1880. On July 1, 1881, the Utah Central, the Utah Southern, and the Utah Southern Extension were incorporated as a single line (from Ogden to Frisco) named the Utah Central Railroad. Although the Union Pacific held a controlling interest in this line, it continued to be operated independently. The Oregon Short Line came into existence in 1878 through combining portions of existing railroads, and provided the Union Pacific with access to the Pacific Northwest. The line was completed to Huntington, Oregon, in 1884, and on August 1, 1889, this road took over the Utah and Northern, the Utah Central, and other Union Pacific-controlled lines in Utah, and created a new company called the Oregon Short Line and Utah Northern Railway. This new organization controlled all the Union Pacific holdings in Utah with the exception of the main line of the transcontinental route into Ogden. The line was once again reorganized on May 16, 1897, as the Oregon Short Line Railroad Company.

In March 1901 the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad was incorporated with the view of building a rail line direct from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles. Through a series of reorganizations and agreements the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake took over all of the Oregon Short Line properties south of Sandy and west of Salt Lake City, and the through line was finished by January 1905. In 1916 the name of the railroad was changed to the Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad Company, and the Union

Pacific obtained control of it in 1921. A line that was really a technical upgrading of existing facilities was the Lucin Cut-Off, which was built by a subsidiary of the Southern Pacific. The Ogden and Lucin Railroad Company was organized in June of 1900 and constructed the fill and trestle cutoff across Great Salt Lake west of Ogden. The cutoff, completed in 1903, shortened the line by 40 miles. The Denver and Rio Grande Western system in Utah had its origin in construction of mine-associated railroads. The earliest of these, the Bingham Canyon and Camp Floyd Railroad, was organized in September 1872. It extended from a junction with the Utah Southern near Sandy to the Bingham Canyon mining district, which it reached on November 21, 1873. This system became part of the Denver and Rio Grande Western on September 1, 1881. Another line was the Utah and Pleasant Valley Railroad, a narrow gauge line from the Utah Southern at Provo to the coalfields just over the summit of Spanish Fork Canyon. This line was completed from Springville to the coal mines in 1879, and it was sold to the Denver and Rio Grande Western on June 14, 1882. The Denver and Rio Grande Western itself was formally incorporated on July 21, 1881, as a Utah subsidiary of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway of Colorado. By May 21, 1883, the Denver and Rio Grande Western had extended its lines from Ogden to the Colorado border and from there to Denver. Eventually (in 1891), the Denver and Rio Grande Western completed a route to Salina via Thistle and Mant. Other small lines constructed by the Denver and Rio Grande Western include the Provo-to-Heber branch line constructed in 1898 (today's "Heber Creeper"), and a branch from Springville to Eureka completed in 1892. In 1905 the Denver and Rio Grande interests helped create the Western Pacific Railroad Company to develop a through route to California. Financed primarily through a loan from the Denver and Rio Grande, the Western Pacific was completed through Utah in 1910. Regular passenger operations between Salt Lake City and San Francisco began August 22 of that year. Because of financial difficulties the Western Pacific was ultimately separated from Denver and Rio Grande ownership.

There were a number of independent railway companies in Utah, most associated with mining activities. As an example, the Salt Lake and Mercur Railroad was completed in 1894 to bring the minerals out of the Mercur mining region. Completed in February 1895, it was dismantled in 1914 after the mines at Mercur had played out. There were several short railways in Carbon County associated with mining activities there. In addition to mine-associated enterprises, urban railway systems, with horse-drawn cars and, later, electric trolley cars, were developed from the 1870s on, while interurban

railways along the Wasatch Front and into Cache Valley appeared in the 1890s. An example is the Ogden & Northwestern Railroad Company (originally the Ogden & Utah Hot Springs), a mine, lumber, and passenger line between Ogden and Hot Springs, nine miles to the north via Harrisville and Pleasant View. A horse-car line when operations commenced in 1891, the Ogden & Northwestern was reclassified an electric line in 1908, two years before its abandonment. For reference, see Bibliography, numbers 1, 14, 180, 261, 290

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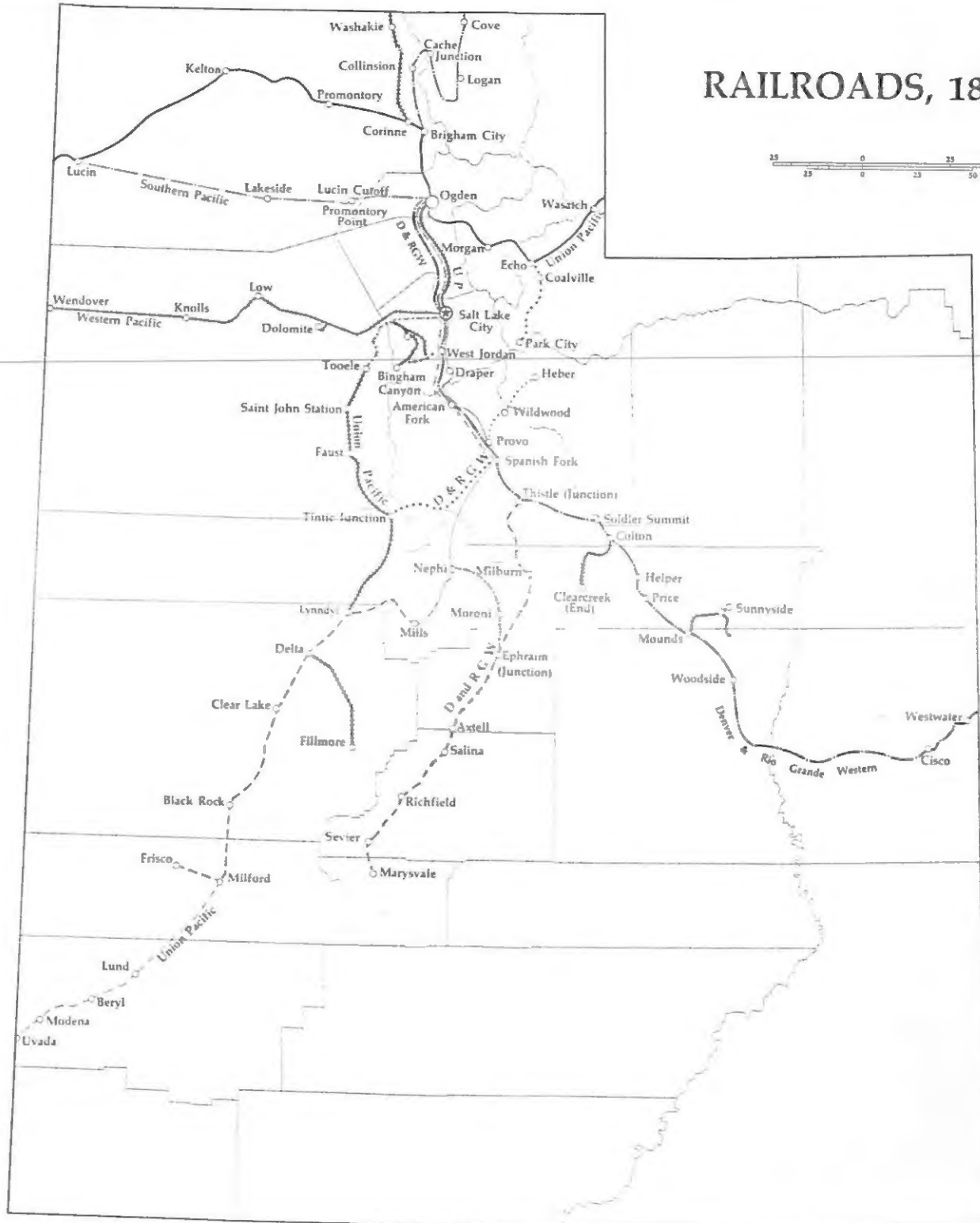
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THE WHISTLE, I CAN'T BLOW.

IT'S NOT MY PLACE TO SAY HOW FAR
THE TRAIN'S ALLOWED TO GO.

IT'S NOT MY PLACE TO SKOOT OFF STEAM
NOR EVEN CLANG THE BELL.

BUT LET THE DAMN THING JUMP THE TRACK
AND SEE WHO CATCHES HELL!

